

## McGregor and Its Oldest Drug House

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## McGregor and Its Oldest Drug House

In the year 1856, Samuel J. Peterson, then residing in Calmar, Iowa, accepted a position with Hoffman, Benton & Co., Wholesale druggists and grocers in McGregor, Iowa. To get the position, it was necessary to report the following day for work, after he had received a communication from them. As work was scarce, he left Calmar at five in the morning and walked the distance of forty-three miles to McGregor. On the way down, he passed many wagons, most of them drawn by oxen, on their way to and from McGregor. The incoming wagons were loaded with grain and hogs, while the ones coming out carried merchandise for the towns west of McGregor. Some of these wagons traveled as far as Albert Lea, Minnesota.

McGregor, at that time, was the only market where farmers could dispose of their produce for cash, excepting Dubuque or LaCrosse. Teams would line the streets for a mile or more waiting to be weighed on the city scales by Capt. Hoffman and buyers would inspect the wagons, making bids on the produce. McGregor had a large population then and scenes like the above were even common many years later, in fact up to the time the Milwaukee Railroad reached Monona. Many wholesale houses were located there and a large volume of business was transacted.

Luthe Bros. now located in Des Moines, Iowa, were in business there at that time. In winter, the hogs were hauled to McGregor from all surrounding territory, hundreds of loads coming in a single day. They were dressed and frozen, and often had to be stored on the open prairie because no cars were available for shipping them. The packers in Chicago and Milwaukee urged the farmers to ship their hogs alive, but many years passed before they could be influenced to do so.

During that time, the future of McGregor as a city was probably at stake. Many men with capital came to McGregor to locate factories and erect buildings, but upon learning that no valid title to the land was to be obtained, they went to Dubuque or LaCrosse. All lots were squatted on and many

places were erected, not knowing whether a good title would be obtained or not. The reason for this was a quarrel between three brothers, Duncan, James and Gregor McGregor, who owned nearly all of the land in and around the town. This quarrel lasted for more than 20 years resulting in lawsuits and litigations. After their death, their heirs protected all squatters with warranty deeds at values prevailing when squatted on.

Immigration into Iowa was then very high—1856-60. Government land offices were established and land sold for \$1.25 per acre. Many money lenders were there also and entered land for those that could not pay \$1.25 per acre and 40 percent interest per annum, giving them a bond for a deed with privilege of renewal. It was about that time that the canal or sewer as it is now called, was built, and before being completed nearly \$100,000 was expended in its construction.

In the spring, when navigation on the river opened, traffic was at its height. Several lines of steamboats made McGregor their landing place, the Diamond Joe line being among the foremost. The owner, Diamond Joe, made his home there. They carried merchandise to McGregor from points as far as Pittsburgh and from there it was hauled by wagon to towns west of it. During the summer months, McGregor represented a city on account of the large floating population. The town was known far and wide and many people came out of curiosity to see the place.

It has been the home of many prominent men. Young Brown, after leaving McGregor became president of the N. Y. Central Railroad. Ringling Bros. conducted a harness shop in McGregor before starting in the circus business. Their first exhibition was given there with five dogs, a horse or two, and one acrobat.

McGregor was representative of a typical western town of its class. The flat (now a ball diamond) was given over to gambling resorts, dance halls and saloons. It is reported that at one time McGregor boasted of thirty-four saloons from the river to White Springs.

Wagons were ferried across the Mississippi on a horse

ferry conducted by Oley Nelson. They landed about two miles below town. From that point the only good road was the military trail from Ft. Crawford to Ft. Atkinson which was built by the government.

During the great blizzards which prevailed during the winter, travel was dangerous and anyone losing their way was likely to be frozen to death. Times were very hard in those days, low prices prevailing for everything. Eggs were 5 and 6c a dozen, butter @ 7-10c per pound and corn @ 17c per bushel. The foreigners who could not speak English would come into a store and lay the eggs on the counter, placing their fingers on so many eggs for salt, so many for pepper and so on. These people were often so poor that they lived in caves and dugouts.

These events make up the picture of McGregor at the time of the founding of the Peterson Drug Store.

After acquiring sufficient knowledge of the drug business, Mr. Peterson in partnership with Mr. Ramage founded the Peterson Drug Store May 15th, 1872. It was started in its present location with E. R. Barron & Co., occupying the Clemen's store adjoining.

Mr. Ramage died Feb. 5th, 1876, and the store continued under the firm name of Peterson & Ramage until 1879. It was then changed to Samuel J. Peterson. Mr. Peterson continued the business under his name until Feb. 7th, 1911, when he sold the business to Chas. F. Kramer.

#### *Courtesy Kramer's Drug Store*

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The heritage of the past is the seed that brings forth the harvest of the future.

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MARTIAL—LATIN

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